

Peak 7 Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

Dillon Ranger District, White River National Forest
Summit County, Colorado

Portions of Sections 27 and 28, T.6S, R.77W;
Portions of Sections 23, 24 and 26, T.6S, R.78W;
Portions of Sections 7, 19 and 30, T.7S, R.77W;
Portions of Sections 1, 12 and 13, T.7S, R.78W;
6th Principal Meridian

Comments Welcome

The Dillon Ranger District of the White River National Forest welcomes your comments on its proposal to conduct hazardous fuels reduction activities in the vicinity of Breckenridge, Colorado (Map 1). Your comments will help us further identify issues associated with proposed activities. Additional and updated project information will be available online at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57601>

This project is currently being considered for categorical exclusion from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement using the following authority:

Sections 605 of HFRA (16 U.S.C.6591d) – Wildfire Resilience. Hazardous fuels reduction projects in designated areas on National Forest System lands. The hazardous fuels project is within an insect and disease treatment area that was designated by the Secretary under HFRA section 602(b) by March 23, 2018. (HFRA, Section 605(c)(2)(C)).

Background

Recent wildfires in Summit County such as the Peak 2 (2017), Tenderfoot 2 (2017) and Buffalo Mountain (2018) forced mandatory evacuations, threatened life, property and infrastructure. The Peak 2 fire led to the evacuation of the entire Peak 7 neighborhood where some of this project will be focused. These wildfire incidents reinvigorated community support for accelerated implementation of hazardous fuels projects within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)¹.

On July 28, 2011 the Breckenridge Forest Health and Fuels Environmental Assessment, Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact authorized the agency to implement forest health and fuels treatments in and around the Breckenridge area. One of the project's goal was to provide Community Protection Zones (CPZ)² on National Forest System Lands

¹ Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) – an area within or adjacent to an at-risk community identified in recommendations to the Secretary in a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (The Healthy Forests Initiative and Healthy Forests Restoration Act, p. 51 USDA, FS-799, February 2003).

² Community Protection Zone (CPZ) – fuel break areas to provide for public and firefighter safety on NFS lands adjacent to private property or community infrastructure. Four hundred feet was chosen as a safe width for a crown fire free zone under high to extreme weather conditions (Scott, 2003). Fuel breaks could be as much as 600 feet wide, but may be less depending on terrain and vegetation. The reason for extending up to the 600-foot width is to have the ability to “feather” the treatments to blend in with natural features.

adjacent to communities in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) that have been identified as having an elevated risk due to hazardous fuel accumulations resulting from the mountain pine beetle outbreak. This decision included adaptive management guidelines for a variety of proposed treatment units in the project area. The adaptive management guidelines allowed only removal or salvage of dead trees and did not allow clearcut prescription hazardous fuels treatments in specified treatment units until tree mortality reached 60% or greater (measured in Basal Area per Acre). Very few of the adaptive management treatment units identified in this proposal reached the 60% mortality guideline threshold and still do not meet that threshold in 2020 to warrant a clearcut prescription treatment.

The Forest Service has identified treatment units in the Breckenridge Forest Health and Fuels Project Decision Notice (July 2011) that will need modifications to the current adaptive management thresholds in order to immediately create CPZs that effectively create a crown fire free zone under high to extreme weather conditions; and, break up the continuity of hazardous fuels adjacent to homes.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need of the proposed action is to:

- Provide a 400-600 foot CPZ on NFS lands adjacent to communities in the WUI that have been identified as having an elevated risk due to hazardous fuels.
- Reduce the impacts of a potential wildfire on forest resources and firefighter safety by breaking up the continuity of hazardous fuels over the long term.

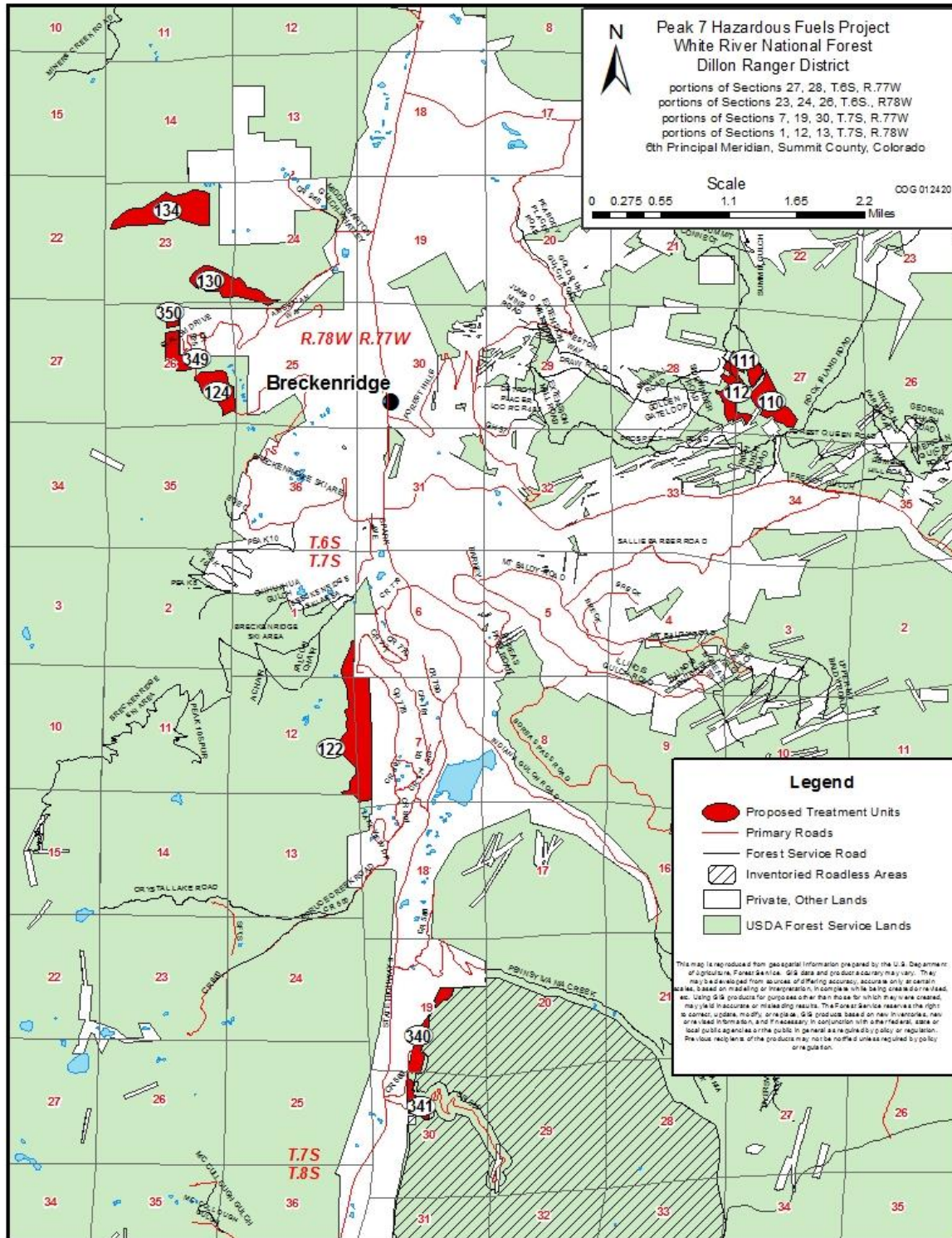
Proposed Action

As previously stated, very few of the July 2011 approved adaptive management treatment units reached the 60% mortality guideline threshold to permit a clearcut prescription. Therefore, through tiering to the July 2011 analysis, the Dillon Ranger District proposes to remove the current adaptive management threshold to immediately reduce hazardous fuels and create CPZs in the vicinity of Breckenridge,

Approximately 522 acres (+_10%) of mechanized treatments, hand treatments and pile burning are proposed. These same 522 acres and locations were analyzed and approved in the July 2011 decision. Mechanized harvesting would be used where there is adequate transportation access to remove forest products. In areas where transportation access is limited, hand treatments and pile burning would be implemented.

CPZ treatment units would be adjacent to private lands and extend up to 600 feet from private land boundaries depending upon terrain and vegetation. Other proposed treatments to break

Map 1 – Peak 7 Hazardous Fuels Project Vicinity Map



up the continuity of hazardous fuels would be near private land boundaries and irregular in shape and size. Silvicultural prescriptions would include clearcutting (>20 acres in size), patch clearcutting (1-19 acres in size) and/or thinning. Clearcutting and patch clearcutting removes all trees (except healthy seedlings and saplings) within a proposed unit. Thinning reduces the densities of trees and increases the crown spacing amongst trees within a proposed unit. Thinning can be evenly spaced or clumpy in orientation. One or more prescription may be used within each treatment unit.

Table 1 identifies proposed treatment units in need of prescription modifications to meet future desired conditions. These proposed treatment units were analyzed and approved in the Breckenridge Forest Health and Fuels Project Decision Notice (July 2011). These proposed treatment units retain the same unit identity number as in the July 2011 Decision Notice.

Table 1: Proposed Treatment Units

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Silvicultural Prescription</i>	<i>Modified Silvicultural Prescription</i>
<i>110, 111, 112, 122, 124, 130, 134, 349, 350</i>	<i>472</i>	<i>Adaptive Management*1</i>	<i>Clearcut, Patch Clearcut, Thin</i>
<i>340, 341 (outside of roadless area)</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Adaptive Management*1</i>	<i>Clearcut, Patch Clearcut, Thin</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>522</i>		

**1 Adaptive Management, Clearcut if mortality is greater than 60% mortality (basal area). Retain Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, aspen as leave trees.*

Nature of Decision to be Made

This project is being considered within a category of actions established by statute for hazardous fuels reduction activities and is excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) per Section 605 of HFRA (16 U.S.C.6591d). A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action.

Public Involvement

The project was first listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in February 2020 and updates are provided quarterly. During the initial development of the proposed action, Forest Service staff reached out to Peak 7 homeowners; Summit County; Town of Breckenridge; Forest Health Task Force; and Red, White and Blue Fire Protection District. During the 2011 scoping process, three field trips and numerous public meetings provided members of the public an opportunity to comment on the proposed action. As a result of this collaboration from 2009-2011, a modified proposed action and third alternative to the proposed action were analyzed in the EA.

Comment Process

The Dillon Ranger District is now soliciting comments on the proposed action. Your feedback on this proposal will assist in refining design features and identifying potential issues. Comments specific to the proposed action that identify a cause-effect relationship are most helpful.

The following options are available for submitting comments:

Electronic comments including attachments can be submitted to:

<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=57601>

Hard copy comments can be mailed, or hand-delivered to:

Mail

Dillon Ranger District
Attn: Eric White
PO Box 620
Silverthorne, CO 80498

Hand Deliver

Dillon Ranger District
Attn: Eric White
680 Blue River Parkway
Silverthorne, CO 80498

Comments will be accepted any time, but are most helpful if submitted prior to March 10th, 2020. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act. Decisions that are categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are not subject to an administrative review process (pre-decision objection process) (Agriculture Act of 2014, Subtitle A. Sec. 8006).

Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from: Eric White, (970) 262-3489, eric.white@usda.gov

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